

PUBLIC SCOPING NOTICE
PREPARATION OF AN
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
and
COORDINATED ACTIVITY PLAN
FOR THE
JACK MORROW HILLS AREA
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ROCK SPRINGS FIELD OFFICE

LOCATION, PURPOSE, AND NEED

The Bureau of Land Management completed the Green River Resource Management Plan (GRRMP) in 1997. Management decisions in the GRRMP on leasing fluid minerals and on locatable minerals were deferred from a portion of the Green River Resource Area referred to as the "Core Area." These deferrals were necessary because information regarding mineral leasing or locations for mining claims was not yet sufficiently developed to make sound management decisions.

The deferred mineral issues and management of other resources were addressed in a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Jack Morrow Hills (JMH) Coordinated Activity Plan (CAP). The draft EIS was published in June 2000. The planning analysis area of the CAP was expanded beyond the Core Area to address potential cumulative impacts of activities that could occur within the Core Area and adjacent lands.

The public review of the draft EIS resulted in additional resource information and public comments that warranted reformulation and analysis of land management alternatives. Completion of the project was thus delayed to evaluate the comments and new information.

The BLM is now conducting additional public scoping meetings to help identify issues to be addressed in developing a full range of land management alternatives, including a conservation alternative and a preservation alternative. A comprehensive, supplemental draft EIS will be prepared for the reformulated alternatives for the CAP.

The JMH area is located northeast of Rock Springs, Wyoming, and covers approximately 622,330 acres of federal, state, and private lands. The planning area for the CAP includes four areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC); Steamboat Mountain, Greater Sand Dunes, White Mountain Petroglyphs, and Oregon Buttes. The CAP area also includes seven wilderness study areas and part of the South Pass Historic Landscape ACEC. The general location of the JMH planning area is shown in Attachment 1.

Other decisions in the GRRMP may be modified as a result of the JMH CAP planning effort. This JMH CAP will provide management direction for the protection of resources (e.g., desert elk and other big game habitat, sand dune-mountain shrub habitat, unstable and stable sand dunes, cultural resources, etc.) while allowing for appropriate levels of leasing and development of energy resources, recreational activities, grazing practices, and other activities. The mineral decisions throughout the JMH CAP planning area are deferred pending completion of the CAP. This planning effort will address the appropriate level and timing of leasing and development of mineral resources; transportation planning, access, designation of

roads; wildlife habitat and vegetation management; livestock grazing practices; and other issues. Attachment 2 shows land ownership and the core area.

RESOURCE ISSUES

The following list of preliminary issues was identified during preparation of the original draft EIS for the JMH CAP. This list is intended as a starting point from which to identify additional resource issues or concerns specific to the JMH CAP area in order to include them during the analysis process.

Issue 1: Minerals Resource Management and Rights-of-Way

Special attention is needed to address mineral development (i.e., oil/gas, coalbed methane, coal, diamonds, and gold) and related transportation network and other ancillary facility conflicts with other land and resource uses and values. Principal considerations include disruptive activities and human presence in elk, deer, and fisheries habitat, big game (i.e., moose, elk, deer, antelope) crucial habitat (crucial winter range and birthing areas), and other important wildlife species habitats (e.g., sage grouse, plovers, raptors); on recreation values, forage uses, air quality, sensitive vegetation types, and sensitive watersheds. Areas where surface-disturbing activities (e.g., mineral exploration and development activities, right-of-way construction activities, etc.) are suitable, not suitable, or should be restricted, need to be identified.

For mineral development, Reasonably Foreseeable Development (RFD) projections will be made for use in developing the JMH CAP. For minerals and all other programs and activities, reasonably foreseeable actions or activity projections will also be made for the review.

Issue 2: Resource Uses Affecting Vegetation, Soils, Air, and Watershed Values

There are conflicting demands for consumptive and nonconsumptive uses of the vegetation resources in the planning area. The basic problem is providing for resource values and nonconsumptive uses while allowing for consumptive uses. Resource values include maintenance of general vegetative cover; watershed protection; maintenance and enhancement of riparian areas; soil stabilization; maintenance and enhancement of wildlife habitat (particularly big game crucial winter range and habitat for threatened and endangered or other special status wildlife and vegetative species); and air quality protection. Consumptive uses include livestock grazing; off-road vehicle use; and vegetation removal by mineral development, rights-of-way construction, and other surface disturbing activities.

Issue 3: Recreation and Cultural Resource Management

There are certain resources and areas that need protection while others need to be considered for more public and recreational uses. Off-road vehicle (ORV) use can conflict with other land and resource uses and can cause damage to resources, including wildlife and watershed values and other recreation values. Principal considerations include providing for suitable and sufficient recreation uses and facilities (both dispersed and commercial), particularly in the ORV open area, visual resource management direction, road designations (transportation planning), and management of cultural and historical resources (of particular concern is the need for protection of Native American respected places). Providing for visitor health and safety in areas with mineral development (i.e., ORV recreation area and oil/gas development) is also a concern.

Issue 4: Special Management Area Resource Management

There are unique areas or sensitive lands and resources in the planning area that meet the criteria for protection and management under special management designations. There are five areas designated as areas of critical environmental concern (ACEC B Greater Sand Dunes, Steamboat Mountain, Oregon Buttes, White Mountain Petroglyphs, and a portion of the South Pass Historic Landscape ACEC) that contain unique resources requiring special management attention. There are three special recreation management areas (SRMA--the Greater Sand Dunes, continental Divide National Scenic Trail, and the Oregon/Mormon Pioneer/Pony Express/California National Historic Trails) containing recreation values that require special management attention. There are also concerns that special management area designations may result in too many restrictions on the use of public lands.

Based upon public input, an interdisciplinary team of resource specialists will determine reasonable alternatives and the appropriate level of environmental analysis.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING CRITERIA

The planning criteria for the JMH CAP are the ground rules that guide the planning effort and how various alternatives are to be developed and considered prior to selecting the final CAP.

The planning criteria ensure that the planning effort complies with all legal requirements; addresses all issues affecting public land resources and land use activities in the planning area; and identifies the scope of the planning effort.

The JMH CAP will focus on the potential environmental consequences of reasonably foreseeable mineral development and reasonably foreseeable levels of other land use activities in the planning area. Types of development may include oil and gas and locatable mineral exploration and development; range, watershed and road improvements; recreational and interpretive facilities, etc. All impacts of mineral development and other activities must be assessed in accordance with the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), which requires the preparation of an EIS for this project. In addition, the CAP that is developed must comply with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA), which requires the BLM to use and observe the principles of multiple use, sustained yield, and environmental integrity in the planning for and management of the public lands.

1: Planning Criteria for Specific Resource Programs

The following categories of planning criteria and guidelines, as delineated in the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook, will be applied in this planning effort:

- Criteria for Hydrocarbon Leasing and Development Potential
- Criteria for Locatable Minerals
- Criteria for Using Wyoming BLM Mitigation Guidelines
- Criteria for Healthy Rangelands
- Criteria for Coal Screening and Planning Process
- Criteria for Wilderness Study Areas and Identification of Potential New Wilderness Study Areas
- Criteria for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs)
- Criteria for Wild Horses

- Criteria for Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Criteria for Livestock Grazing
- Criteria for Withdrawals and Other Classifications
- Criteria for Multiple Use Considerations

2: Planning Criteria for Using NEPA Environmental Analysis Procedure to Develop the CAP

The basic principles of NEPA state that the Federal Government shall:

- Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations
- Assure for all Americans a safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings
- Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences
- Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice
- Achieve a balance between population resource use that will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities
- Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

The original draft EIS for the JMH CAP (1998-2000) is to be re-analyzed and a supplemental draft EIS and final EIS are to be prepared. A complete public involvement process will be included. The basic steps of this process include:

- Public Scoping Period
- Development of Alternatives
- Public Review of Alternatives
- Development of a Preferred Alternative
- Public review of the supplemental draft EIS
- Governor's Review and Public Protest Period
- Issuance of the Proposed JMH CAP and final EIS
- Resolution of Any Protests
- Record of Decision

The result of this process will be an approved JMH CAP that addresses all issues raised by the public within the context of the project.

3: Management Level Criteria and Considerations for the Formulation of Alternatives

The primary purpose of preparing the EIS is to guide the BLM in designing and implementing management strategies that affect resource and land use activities in the planning area. The following factors will be key considerations in the development of alternatives (i.e., alternative CAPs) to be analyzed:

- Fire management

- Providing for unique cultural and historic resources, including archaeological sites, historic trails and sites, and Native American respected places
- Providing for vegetative quality and preservation of sensitive and rare plant species
- Watershed management and water quality protection
- Potential for mineral and energy source exploration and development
- Identification of transportation needs as well as vehicular use area limitations
- Opportunities for land disposal or acquisition that could be useful in meeting BLM resource management goals
- Opportunities for acquisition of access rights to accommodate planned uses
- Identification of needed protective withdrawals to improve resource manageability
- Livestock grazing
- Recreational and interpretive opportunities
- Wildlife habitat management

4: Criteria for Selection of a Preferred Alternative

In developing a Preferred Alternative, the goal is to obtain a balance of allowable activities and management strategies that meet all legal mandates. Specifically, the approved JMH CAP should meet the following objectives:

- Identify levels of resource and land use conditional requirements needed to protect natural and cultural resources for future generations while accommodating reasonable levels of current and sustainable multiple uses
- Produce guidelines for reduction of sedimentation and salinity, as required by the Water Quality Act
- Accommodate reasonable public access for land use and resource development and comply with the Americans with Disability Act for barrier-free access
- Comply with existing applicable land use plans, programs, and policies of state, local, and federal agencies and Native American tribes
- Comply with the objectives of the National Fire Plan and 10-year Comprehensive Fire Strategy
- Comply with existing legal conservation strategies and recovery plans for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species
- Acknowledge and strive to help meet the socioeconomic goals of local communities.

ATTACHMENT 1
General Location Map

ATTACHMENT 2
Surface Ownership Map